



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Speech

from the

Throne

FEBRUARY 12, 2002



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**The Honourable Iona Campagnolo
Lieutenant-Governor
at the Opening of the
Third Session, Thirty-Seventh Parliament
of the
Province of British Columbia
February 12, 2002**



Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members.

It is a privilege to address you on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen of Canada, to open the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of British Columbia.

In the name of all British Columbians I have conveyed our thanks and good wishes to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on the recent observation of the 50th anniversary of her accession to the throne and expressed our anticipation of her Golden Jubilee visit to British Columbia in October. I have also sadly conveyed the sympathy of our citizens to Her Majesty on the recent loss of her beloved and only sister, Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret. A book of condolence has been opened at Government House, which I am sure will provide some sympathy and comfort to Her Majesty at this sad time.

When I spoke to you in my personal address on installation last September, I was able to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, The Honourable Garde B. Gardom.

As this is my first Speech from the Throne, let me begin by saying what an honour it is to serve in this Office that has been so ably and admirably

served by those who have preceded me in this place. I am proud to acknowledge the presence in the Chamber today of The Honourable Robert Rogers and Ms. Jane Rogers and The Honourable Garde Gardom and Ms. Helen Gardom, who throughout their lives of public service have acted in an exemplary manner, befitting our pride in this beautiful province that is our home where they have served as exemplars and inspirations to us all.

On behalf of all British Columbians, and Members of this place, we thank them and wish them well in their honoured and well-deserved retirement.

We also pay tribute to the many others who have left their indelible mark on our province and have, sadly, passed away. This year as every other, it is impossible to adequately recognize all those who we have lost.

Some of those whose passing we mourn are former B.C. Supreme Court Justice Tom Fisher, former MLA and B.C. Supreme Court Justice Jay Gould, and former Surrey Mayor and Greater Vancouver Regional District Chair Don Ross.

We shall miss Ted Peck, whose colourful fish tales and popular television program, *Tides and Trails*, provided such pleasure, with its memorable signature closing, "Tight lines and straight shooting."

British Columbians lost a precious soul and talent in the late Donald Jarvis, whose teachings and paintings will forever live on in West Coast culture. Norma Macmillan, too, will long be remembered by us all as the gentle voice of Casper the Friendly Ghost and television's beloved Gumby. And few people have worked harder for British Columbia than Cyril Shelford — a noted author, public servant and Member of this Assembly for 22 years.

The world has changed dramatically since my government's last Throne Speech, less than seven months ago.

The sobering events of September 11th have impacted our lives in many ways, from our sympathy and support to our neighbours in their loss, to our concern for resulting effects on our mobility, security and global access to commerce. The global economy is still reeling from the impact, and our provincial economy has been hit especially hard.

Next week, my government will bring in its budget for the new year. That budget will give all British Columbians a clear sense of the fiscal challenges at hand and the tough decisions that must be made.

Change is never easy. Yet more than ever, fundamental change is required to the size and scope of government — and to the role it serves in people's lives and in our economy.

Last Spring, British Columbians gave my government an overwhelming mandate for change, and it is acting on that mandate to build a solid foundation for economic and social renewal.

Though that need for change will never stop, my government's vision remains the same: to usher in a new era of hope, prosperity and public service in British Columbia.

My government's priorities will not waver, and its mission will not be altered.

My government was not elected to follow the broken rut of the status quo, or to run from the challenges that change presents. It was elected to lead our province forward and to break new ground in search of brighter horizons.

My government's course is clear, and its direction is firmly set. It will revitalize British Columbia's economy, restore sound fiscal management, and put patients and students first.

The changes my government has planned and initiated will do just that. Over time, they will lead our province to new fields of hope and opportunity.

Revitalizing the economy

My government's central mission is to revitalize the economy as quickly as possible.

Economic growth is the bedrock for prosperity upon which all public services depend. It is the vital base for stability and opportunity in every community and the critical determinant of what government can and cannot afford to do.

When our economy suffers, people pay the price. Jobs are lost. Dreams are shattered. And vital public services are limited for want of revenue.

No economy is immune from the volatility of global markets, and British Columbia has been particularly exposed from its heavy dependence on natural resources.

My government has a solid plan to turn our provincial economy around. The steps it has taken — and will be taking this Legislative Session and beyond — will make our economy more competitive, diversified and attractive to investors. In time, they will provide a sustainable framework to maximize growth and job creation, and once again establish British Columbia as an economic leader in North America.

Last summer, my government acted upon all of the 22 commitments it vowed to undertake in its first 90 days. Together, those measures went a long way towards restoring a competitive footing for investment and providing a major stimulus to our provincial economy.

My government cut personal income taxes, reduced corporate income taxes, and eliminated other business taxes that were discouraging job creation.

My government also acted to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses, restore workers' rights, and create a level playing field for all B.C. businesses through the elimination of business subsidies. Specific subsidies that have been identified for elimination were outlined at last month's open Cabinet meeting in Fort St. John and will be repealed by legislation as necessary this Session.

Within the next few weeks, the independent B.C. Progress Board my government appointed will issue its first report. It has established a series of benchmarks and performance measures to hold my government accountable on a quarterly basis for progress in our economy.

While our provincial economy may not be as strong and healthy as we would all like, there are signs it is on the mend. For example, last year British Columbia posted Canada's largest increase in housing sales. It had the highest percentage increase in residential construction in the nation. Retail sales have been increasing at a faster rate than the national average, and automobile sales have been strong.

With major sectors of our economy in distress, B.C. still has a long way to go to once again lead the nation in overall economic growth. But a winning framework is rapidly being put in place for economic renewal.

This year, my government is consulting with British Columbians on the steps needed to improve the *Employment Standards Act*, the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Labour Code*. Following those reviews, changes to all three of those Acts will be initiated in this next year to provide greater flexibility, fairness and efficiency for employers and employees alike. And changes to the *Company Act* will be made to cut red tape, improve efficiency and encourage growth in the economy.

These measures will substantially advance my government's goal of reducing the regulatory burden on B.C. businesses by one-third within the next two-and-a-half years.

Later this Spring, the Premier will lead a series of round tables on small business that will invite small-business owners, operators and entrepreneurs to offer their input and advice in that most vital of all sectors.

Small businesses are, by far, the biggest job creators in our economy, and my government wants to hear from them directly on the barriers to expansion and the opportunities for growth.

Nowhere have small businesses shown greater success or explosive potential for growth than in the technology sector.

The Premier's Technology Council, appointed in my government's first 90 days, is running and is showing positive leadership. The Council's first quarterly report in November concentrated on a strategy to bridge the digital divide. Its ongoing work will continue to help tackle that challenge and achieve my government's goal of making British Columbia one of the world's top 10 technology centres by 2006.

Another exciting new area of opportunity for private-sector investment and involvement is in the wide range of possible public-private partnerships.

Working with non-profit organizations and the private sector, my government will explore new cost-effective mechanisms for the provision of services and public-private partnerships. Considerable effort will be focused on pioneering so-called "P3s," which have proven very effective in attracting private capital to support public policy objectives in B.C. and in other jurisdictions. Such opportunities will be actively pursued this year in helping to spur more private-sector investment in transportation and highways, information technology, housing, land and resource development, health support services and facilities, and education infrastructure.

As promised in the Throne Speech last summer, my government is aggressively supporting the bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. Winning the Olympic Games would be a great incentive to amateur sport and to communities in every part of our province.

Combined with an expanded convention centre in Vancouver, the Games would generate up to \$10 billion in economic activity for our province, 228,000 jobs, and \$2.5 billion in total revenues for all levels of government. Tourism resulting from the Games would benefit every community in our province. Just competing for the bid itself offers a great opportunity to sell the world on

British Columbia, and to prove that we are indeed driven by dreams and nature.

Efforts will be intensified and focused to win that bid and to market British Columbia to the world, working in partnership with other levels of government and the private sector. Special effort will be made to explore public-private partnerships in infrastructure integral to the bid, including the expansion of the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre, and needed improvements to the Sea to Sky Highway.

Another sector that has demonstrated spectacular potential for growth is the energy sector. Nowhere is that more evident than in oil and gas development that has generated so much wealth, energy and job creation in British Columbia's Peace River Region.

My government's Energy Policy Task Force has been developing recommendations for a comprehensive provincial energy strategy. Upon completion of the current public consultation process, a final report will be ready next month. This should ensure that my government properly plans for our citizens' energy needs, and also takes full advantage of the enormous opportunities for investment and job creation in energy development.

Measures will be introduced this Session to boost investment and job creation in both the energy and mining sectors. Steps will be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the Oil and Gas Commission and improve the investment climate for mineral exploration.

The *Environmental Assessment Act* will be updated to streamline the major project assessment process. The *Waste Management Act* will be amended to eliminate overlaps in the regulation of mines and to clarify remediation and authorization requirements for various activities conducted on land that may have been contaminated.

Other changes will be made to increase competitiveness, cut red tape, and provide greater access to Crown land and resources.

Changes will be made to establish equality for operating mines in the coal and mineral sectors, and to provide more certainty over access rights to Crown lands with respect to coal tenures.

Recently announced changes will encourage investment in coal bed methane extraction. More will be done in the coming months to develop this resource and generate jobs in regions across our province, from the Kootenays, to Vancouver Island, to the Northeast.

Last October, my government appointed an independent Scientific Panel to assist in determining whether offshore oil and gas exploration could be conducted in a manner that is scientifically sound and environmentally responsible. My government will move with caution to ensure that any activity taken in this regard will always be guided by sound science and an unswerving commitment to responsible environmental protection.

Yet it also wants Northerners to know that they too can look forward to the future with hope and optimism from the opportunities that might flow from the development of our offshore oil and gas deposits.

Obviously, there is no greater economic challenge or critical need than to get our province's number one industry back on track.

The softwood lumber dispute has dragged on, despite my government's best efforts to work with the federal government and other provinces to negotiate a resolution with the United States. Every time progress appears to have been made at the table, it has been frustrated by U.S. lumber lobbies who are not working towards President Bush's stated commitment to free trade. Our forest industry's patience and willingness to work

towards a cooperative solution is near the breaking point. One way or another, a resolution must be reached to this vexing problem that has hurt so many workers and employers in British Columbia's forest industry.

In any case, my government will not wait to initiate the process of desperately needed structural reform in B.C.'s forest industry. It will move this year to deal with stumpage reform that shifts our province towards market-based stumpage. It will move this year to tackle the incredibly complex challenge of forest policy reform.

Obviously, change on this scale cannot be undertaken without some sacrifice. By the same token, my government understands that the only way our forest industry will become more globally competitive and once again expand, is to embrace freer trade and market-based reforms.

One critical reform needed is to streamline the *Forest Practices Code* to make it more results-oriented, cost-effective and workable on the ground, while maintaining the same standard of environmental protection. That challenge too will be met this year. A White Paper on possible reforms to the Code will be issued this Spring, with the objective of tabling legislation this Fall.

Finally, my government will redouble its efforts to market British Columbia forest products around the world, with funding equal to one per cent of direct forest revenues.

My government is also acting to facilitate investment and job creation in the salmon aquaculture industry. Recent changes will ensure that this sector is enhanced, with the toughest environmental protection framework in the world.

B.C.'s farmers too will benefit from a new structure to make the Agricultural Land Commission more regionally responsive to the needs of farmers and communities. The strategic shifts my government is making in the agriculture sector will ensure greater competitiveness, self-regulation and independence in farming that will gradually phase out government subsidies.

All of these initiatives to stimulate our economy will help, as will my government's efforts to promote greater dialogue among the various levels of government and with First Nations.

On February 26th, my government will act on its commitment to sponsor British Columbia's first ever Provincial Congress. The Congress will bring together all of British Columbia's MLAs, MPs and Senators, along with the Mayors from our

province's 15 largest cities, the Presidents of the five regional municipal associations, the President of the Union of B.C. Municipalities, and First Nations leaders.

My government will act this Spring to engage all British Columbians in discussion of the principles to guide the provincial government's negotiating mandate in treaty talks.

A referendum will be conducted later this Spring by mail-in ballot that will put forward questions that have been approved by this Assembly. Those questions will build on the work done by the Select Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. Last November, that Committee released its draft questions for the referendum, after several weeks of public hearings, submissions and deliberations.

The referendum will be overseen by Elections BC, and its results will be binding on government policy. An independent Referendum Office will be established to provide all British Columbians access to information about the referendum process, the treaty process, and issues of Aboriginal rights and title. It will also ensure that information is provided on the various perspectives on the referendum questions that may be held by different governments, First Nations and citizens at large.

My government's aim is to help all voters to become informed about the referendum questions and the issues they address in as fair and neutral a manner as possible. All British Columbians should know that my government's commitment to negotiated treaty settlements and the treaty process is not in question, nor is it open to debate.

The referendum cannot and will not be a tool for interfering in, or undermining, constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights and title. The referendum is intended to help fast-track treaty negotiations by giving all British Columbians a direct say on the principles that they think treaties should reflect and that will guide my government at the negotiating table. My government's clear intent is to foster greater understanding of the treaty process and to build public support for the critical need for treaties.

My government will continue to work with First Nations to expedite interim measures agreements, build capacity and produce tangible achievements that make a real difference for Aboriginal British Columbians' economic opportunities, health and quality of life.

My government is also committed to giving local governments more autonomy and better planning and revenue tools to reduce property tax pressures and enhance community stability.

The Community Charter Council was appointed by legislation last summer. The Council will table its report, including draft legislation, in a White Paper that will be publicly released during this Session. Following further consultation, Community Charter legislation will be introduced in this Chamber within the next year.

All of these initiatives will help pave the way for greater prosperity.

However, another critical element to achieving that end is a plan to get British Columbia's fiscal house in order.

Restoring sound fiscal management

Government must plan to live within its means and then do what is necessary to keep within that budget.

People wanted and demanded more services each year, and it is difficult to resist that political pressure. It is easier to say "yes" than it is to say "no".

That is the story of escalating debt and deficit budgets that was replayed for decades in every jurisdiction in Canada, until taxpayers started making different demands. They started to say

"no more". No more deficits. No more wasteful spending. No more putting future taxpayers in debt because governments lack the discipline to live within their means.

B.C. taxpayers sent a new message in the general election last year. They elected a new government to make the decisions necessary to live within taxpayers' ability to pay.

By voting for my government's pledge to dramatically cut income taxes within its first 90 days, British Columbians also made it clear what they meant by *their* ability to pay. They wanted the lowest base personal income tax rates in Canada on the first \$60,000 of income, and more competitive income tax rates across the board. And that is what has been provided.

British Columbians voted to protect funding for health and education this year, at the levels established in the former government's last budget. My government did just that. In fact, it increased health funding by \$200 million beyond the amount it promised to maintain.

British Columbians also voted for my government's commitment to balance the budget by its third full budget, in 2004-05. Next week, my government will spell out how it plans to meet that commitment.

In short, my government received a mandate to cut income taxes, restore sound fiscal management, and focus resources first on patients, students and people in need. The measures my government announced and will implement in the coming years are aimed at honouring that mandate.

It is simply not possible to pay for everything that government used to do, and also balance the budget. It is simply irresponsible to put off the tough changes that must be made to bring spending into line with revenues.

My government will not break its trust with the people.

Spending will be reduced in areas other than health and education. Revenues will increase as our economy recovers. The budget will be balanced.

It won't be easy and it won't be without some hardship. But my government will do what needs to be done to get its financial affairs in order.

My government has done its best to focus its scarce resources where they are needed most — on patients, students and those in need. My government has done its best to ascertain which services are truly "core" services, and which ones are not. All of those decisions have been shared in open Cabinet meetings.

My government has been frank about the impact of its difficult choices on its employees, on programs and on community services. Over the next three years, all ministries, not including health and education, will experience an average reduction of 25% in their budgets.

Avoidable costs will be avoided. Unnecessary expenditures will be eliminated. Cost-effective innovations in service delivery will be employed. Assets that make sense to sell will be sold.

Unfortunately, even that will not be enough to cope with the enormity of the \$4.4-billion deficit problem that is facing future generations. The provincial debt has more than doubled in the last decade, and this coming year it will grow by at least another 10%.

Regrettably, my government must eliminate or scale back a number of services that many British Columbians would like to see maintained or increased. It will seek to moderate the impact on people by phasing out several less vital programs and services over the next three years.

Every effort has been made to mitigate the impact, especially on women, seniors, children and those most vulnerable in society. For example, my government has had to scale back spending in

other areas to protect funding for vital services like transition houses for women and children leaving abusive relationships.

My government also remains committed to long-term improvements in services for women, children and families, including a sustainable child-care strategy that is partnership-driven, community-focused and targeted to those most in need.

In making the hard decisions that must be made to reduce spending, my government will continue to put the interests of patients, students and those most in need *first*.

Putting patients, students and people first

There is no greater or more pressing challenge than the need to save and renew public health care. As Canada's 13 Premiers have agreed, the current system is not sustainable. Indeed, that point was made by Members of this Assembly on the Select Standing Committee on Health in their recent report.

Health-care expenditures have tripled in British Columbia since 1985 — yet the system has lost ground every year. In that same period, the proportion that health-care spending consumes of

the annual budget has grown from 31% to nearly 40% — and that is reducing the amount available to be spent on other public services.

British Columbia now spends more each year on health care than it raises in all the revenues *combined* from personal income tax, Medical Service Plan premiums, federal transfer payments and tobacco tax. And still that is not enough.

When Canada's national health-care program was launched almost four decades ago, it basically covered only hospital and doctors' fees.

Pharmacare, home and continuing care, and other services now included in the Medical Services Plan were not publicly funded at that time. Then, the federal government contributed 50% of the costs of the health-care system. Today, the federal government funds only a small fraction of that amount, and the provincial government covers the difference.

Our population has grown older, and life expectancy has increased. The costs of drugs, equipment, technology, doctors' fees and health workers' wages and benefits have all grown exponentially. British Columbia's nurses recently received a 21% wage hike over three years, making them the highest-paid nurses in Canada.

Community health workers and health support workers in B.C. are also the highest paid in their fields in Canada.

When you have the highest-paid workers and runaway costs combined, something has to give. That something is increasingly patient care.

Funding cannot keep up to the cost pressures needed to maintain service levels, let alone improve patient care. This problem will obviously not go away any time soon. It will take major structural reforms that will not be very palatable to many and will challenge us all to accept some short-term sacrifices for long-term improvements in patient care.

In the past eight months, my government has done much to refocus health care funding on patients' needs.

It restructured regional health governance and delivery, to provide greater flexibility and strategic planning of health resources. It gave health authorities new tools to find savings and efficiencies.

My government's comprehensive nursing strategy is already showing results, as the number of nursing vacancies is being reduced. More nurses are being trained. And much higher wages, along

with Canada's lowest income tax rates, are serving as powerful incentives to attract and retain skilled nurses.

My government has committed significant funds to substantially increase the number of medical school graduates, working in partnership with the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria and the University of Northern British Columbia.

Difficult decisions have been made to reduce costs and coverage of supplementary benefits under the Medical Services Plan. Even with an increase of \$1.1 billion in the health budget this year, the pressures on health care are mounting. Potential costs in higher physician fees are sure to grow, without any adequate means to pay for them.

This has left my government with two more unpleasant choices. It could either accept increased service reductions to partially offset wage costs and higher physician fees, or it could raise Medical Service Plan premiums to increase the health budget. Last week, in open Cabinet, my government decided to do the latter, while also protecting lower-income earners.

Approximately 230,000 lower-income British Columbians will actually see their premiums decreased. But for most citizens,

monthly MSP premiums are being raised significantly. This unwelcome measure will substantially increase the health budget. It will provide extra funding to help safeguard patients from the pressures of higher health delivery costs. Yet it won't be enough.

Further changes will be required to make the public health-care system sustainable.

Many of these were outlined very effectively in the Select Standing Committee's report, *Patients First: Renewal and Reform of British Columbia's Health Care System*. It was the product of extensive consultation with British Columbians in communities across our province. Its findings are echoed in other major recent studies on health care in Canada, including the recent preliminary report by the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. In virtually every case, the need for fundamental structural changes is inescapable to save and renew our health-care system.

My government will continue to embrace that needed change in the months and years to come, to build a sustainable health-care system that is consistent with the five principles of the *Canada Health Act*. In this Session, measures will be introduced to reduce costs from duplication, administrative overlaps and overly prescriptive regulatory regimes.

The *Community Care Facility Act* will be substantially improved to establish a more responsive, results-based framework for community care that provides greater flexibility for individual care and consistent care standards.

My government will act this year to advance its target of creating 5,000 new intermediate and long-term care spaces by 2006.

British Columbians' health will be better safeguarded under new legislation to strengthen drinking water and ground water protection. As well, my government will be allocating more resources to the monitoring of drinking water quality. It has already taken concrete steps to improve the quality of drinking water. In conjunction with our federal and local government partners, it has approved the first 15 of many community water and sewer projects planned under the \$800-million Canada-B.C. Infrastructure program.

My government has recently introduced other changes aimed at putting students' interests first. It has acted on its election commitment to provide greater flexibility and local autonomy to elected school boards.

School boards are now able to better utilize and manage their districts' schools, classrooms and resources for students, and they have important new management tools to help them cope with cost pressures. New, legislated class-size limits will also ensure that students' needs are better protected and even enhanced, without the rigidity that prevented common-sense solutions at the school and district levels.

Changes to the *School Act* this Session will be aimed at improving student achievement through better system accountability and increased flexibility and choice for parents and students.

A new school funding formula will be introduced to give school districts a better chance to plan, through three-year funding allocations that are fairer and better aligned with student populations and classroom costs. As well, my government will establish new mechanisms to give parents real and meaningful input into education delivery and quality in our schools, and greater control and choice for their children.

My government also looks forward to the report of the Select Standing Committee on Education. That Committee consulted widely with British Columbians last Fall, and its findings will provide an important source of input.

Later this Spring, my government will organize a Dialogue on Education at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. It will bring together leaders in education from across B.C., including teachers, trustees, business leaders, deans of education, superintendents and parents, to discuss improvements and reforms to our education system.

In this Session, my government will introduce legislation to create more choice for post-secondary students — to ensure the system serves students and school districts better, with greater flexibility to allow them to take advantage of increased choices. This legislation will build on the important new tools that were recently given to colleges, institutes and universities to fully and properly utilize their facilities and resources to put students' interests first.

My government understands that every student learns differently, and has different needs and circumstances. Through the enhancement of degree-granting opportunities for both private and public institutions, students will have a wider variety of choice and flexibility in pursuing their post-secondary education.

My government will allow post-secondary institutions to make their own decisions about their

tuition fee levels. This will restore greater autonomy to the institutions themselves, because they should be directly accountable to the students and communities they serve.

My government will also increase student spaces and restore certainty for learners who have been attending the Technical University of British Columbia. Simon Fraser University will assume responsibility for TechBC students and assets, allowing students to graduate with a degree from SFU while maintaining a presence in the growing community of Surrey.

With a looming skills shortage facing the province, my government recognizes the importance of skills and trades training to our future prosperity and growth.

To pave the way for the introduction of a modern, flexible training system that is more efficient and responsive to industry needs, my government will disband the current Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission. An industry advisory committee will be appointed to guide the transition to the new model, while the funding to institutions for the delivery of skills and trades training will remain intact.

My government will also introduce legislation this Session to focus employment and assistance dollars first on those who are most in need. The legislation will replace four existing Acts. It will also facilitate a strategic shift from a culture of welfare entitlement to a culture of employment and self-sufficiency. The changes will provide for those people who require continuous assistance, and will encourage all individuals to reach their potential. In particular, the changes will insist on greater individual responsibility for those able to actively seek employment.

My government will put children and families first.

Legislation will be introduced this Session to streamline the process for obtaining and enforcing family maintenance orders in cases where one spouse lives in British Columbia and the other lives in a reciprocating jurisdiction. Child protection legislation will be amended to reflect the strategic shifts in child welfare that were outlined in open Cabinet last November. The legislation will offer more options to provide safe care for children within the environment of the extended family. Other strategic shifts will allow for the greater protection of children through the promotion of families and communities, and an increased focus on family development approaches to parents and families.

My government vowed to stop the expansion of gambling that has increased gambling addiction in our province and put new strains on families. That commitment has been kept, in keeping with existing contractual obligations. This Session more will be done. A comprehensive legislative framework will be introduced for regulating and managing gaming more effectively and independently under the Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch and the BC Lottery Corporation.

My government's Administrative Justice Project will also result in several major structural changes this year. Those changes will be aimed at making our province's administrative justice agencies more accessible, fair, efficient and affordable. New legislation will be introduced that consolidates key functions of the Children's Commission and Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate into a new agency, the Children's Officer.

A modernized *Residential Tenancy Act* will also be introduced, drafted in language that everyone can understand. It will protect the rights of renters and landlords, addressing issues such as illegal activities in rental accommodations, the rules for inspections, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

All of the changes outlined here will help lead our province forward to a more promising future — to a new era of hope and prosperity that is bright with possibility and brimming with potential.

Those changes will put our economy back on track, get our fiscal house in order, and begin to correct the structural problems that must be solved. Step by step, they will move us all beyond our fears and expectations, to the limits of our imagination.

Though the storms of change may rage, and rain hard with their resistance, they will not cloud our common purpose.

British Columbians know where my government is heading. And they know it can't get there without the courage of its convictions. Real progress is always difficult, but always worth the effort.

Let there be no doubt: British Columbia is on the move. It is charting new ground and reaching out to claim a better future.

To all citizens, my government holds out this promise: British Columbia's best days lie ahead. In time, we will amaze ourselves at the distance we have travelled together.

Thank you.